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ABSTRACT

This volume of profiles, third in a series of guides on parent choice and schooling, provides short descriptions about the range of exemplary parent information strategies from 21 school districts in 11 states across the nation. The profiles were chosen to be representative of efforts public school districts make to inform parents about available choices. The profiles suggest that, to be successful, parent information strategies must reach out to parents on a one-to-one basis wherever school districts find them. The profiles, slightly more that one page in length, describe the school district's setting, total number of schools, schools of choice, total enrollment, and student ethnic/racial breakdown. The district's outreach is described in terms of background and current status, publicity methods, challenges, and advice. Profiles of unified school districts are the following: Washington, D.C.; Indianapolis, Indiana; Chicago, Illinois; New Orleans, Louisiana; Acton, Massachusetts; Boston, Massachusetts; Cambridge, Massachusetts; Holyoke, Massachusetts; Lowell, Massachusetts; Springfield, Massachusetts; Worcester, Massachusetts; Kansas City, Missouri; Montclair, New Jersey; Buffalo, New York; New York City; Cleveland, Ohio; Columbus, Ohio; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Dallas, Texas; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. (CJH)

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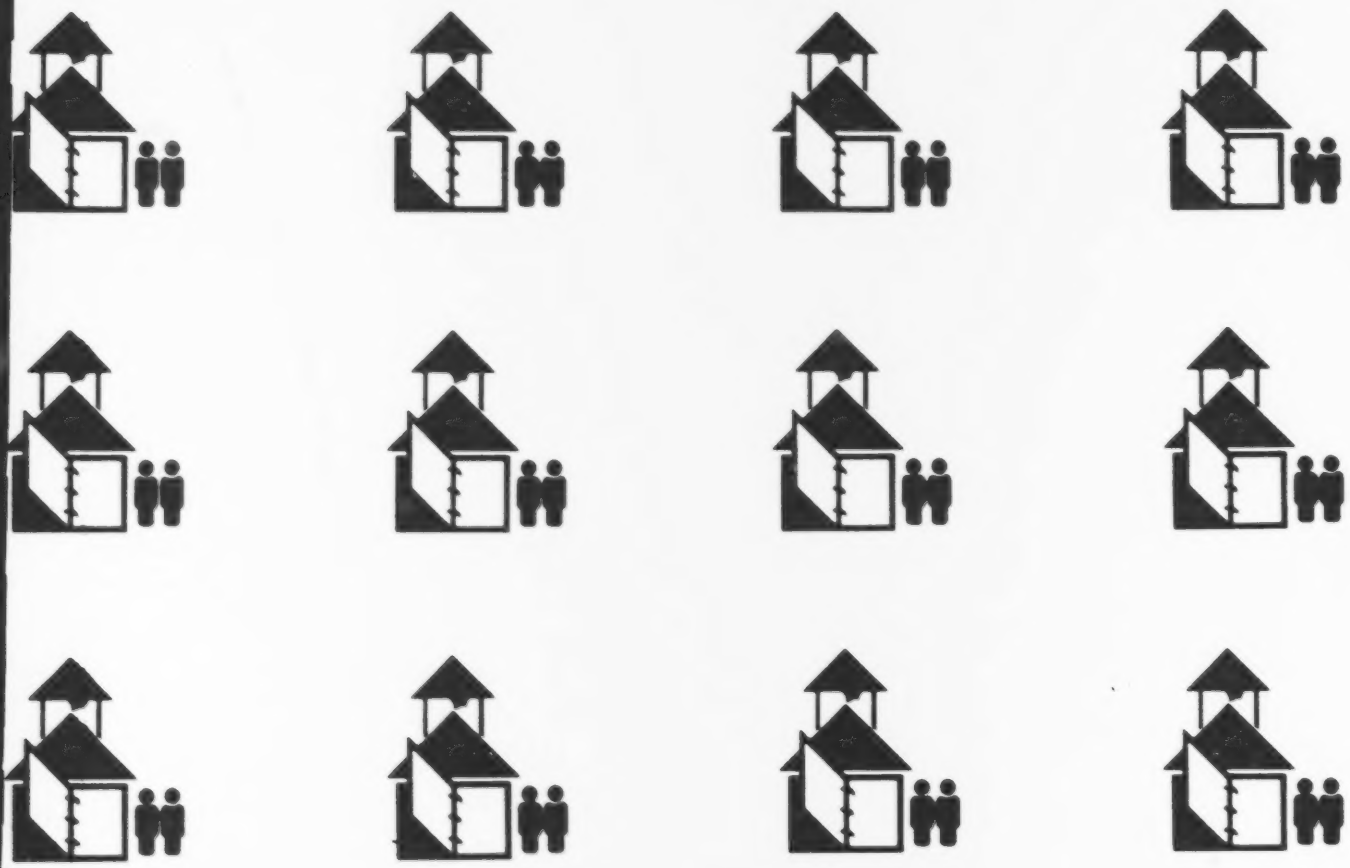
Helping Parents Find Out About Schools of Choice



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PARENT INFORMATION STRATEGIES

Helping Parents Find Out About Schools of Choice

by Laura Ferguson

April 1987

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Other handbooks produced by this project were authored by Evans Clinchy and Ross Zerchykov. Owen Heleen, Publications Director, edited the series of publications; Mary Westropp provided research assistance; and Catherine Baker and Betsy Bigelow provided word processing and secretarial support.

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FOREWORD

An Introduction to the Series "Parent Choice and the Public Schools"

by Ross Zerchykov,
Research Director, Institute for Responsive Education

What determines where children in America go to school? In the vast majority of cases, it is where they and their parents live. But, amidst all the current debate about excellence in education, we never hear of an educational reason why public school children are most often assigned to schools on the basis of place of residence. This system has serious ramifications for equality in our society.

In this and the other volumes in our series "Parent Choice and the Public Schools," we examine the question: Why must where a family can afford to buy or rent housing be the determining factor in where a child goes to school?

We hope this series of publications will be helpful to all those -- parents and taxpayers, school leaders and government officials -- who are beginning to question this connection between education and real estate.

One obvious explanation for the connection (other than inertia) is cost: assignment by residency is relatively simple and holds down administrative and transportation costs, thereby freeing up resources for curriculum and instruction. Arguments

against parent choice as an alternative assignment model often also invoke concern that parent choice could lead to racial resegregation and/or exacerbate socioeconomic segregation. Furthermore, some say increased choice would only be exercised by the more informed, active and educationally ambitious of parents, thereby leading to some schools becoming hotbeds of parent support and involvement, while others become pockets of apathy.

Opening up choice among schools, others argue, would invigorate all schools through competition. Indifferent schools would no longer attract parents and, as in the business world, would go out of business to be replaced by other, more "responsive" schools.

Such claims, when repeated often enough, can begin to sound like self-evident truths. The first of our series of publications, Parent Choice: A Digest of the Research, is designed to shed some light on the costs and benefits of different kinds of parent choice and provide summary answers to the most frequently asked questions about parent choice, based on an analysis of the research and evaluation studies of various parent choice initiatives in the United States, including voucher experiments, magnet schools, public schools of choice and open enrollment programs. The answers, as always, are not definitive or tidy, and some questions can never be answered within the limits of experimentation in education (e.g., what would be the impact of a totally free market in education? -- would consumer sovereignty and the resulting competition equalize opportunities,

and would the resulting competition lead to innovation and excellence? Or, would suppliers in the educational market, like suppliers in all markets, strive to restrict competition?)

Nonetheless, the research evidence is instructive and tells us enough to sift through and put aside some of the claims and counter-claims about choice.

One such claim that could be used to justify the current system of assigning pupils to schools on the basis of residence is that parents don't want anything else. They like the "neighborhood school," as witnessed by community opposition to school closings and "forced busing." And, some contend, choice is irrelevant anyway since, basically, all parents want the same thing: good schools and a good education for their children.

Contrary evidence, however, comes from data in the Gallup Poll on education showing that a significant majority of parents want more choice. (Phi Delta Kappan, September 1986)

But, for local citizens and school leaders, nationally aggregated opinions are less important than local sentiment. One way to find out if local parents want more choice is to simply ask them. A method for doing so, for identifying whether parents want more choice, under what conditions, and what kinds of education they would choose is described in the second volume in our series, Planning for Parent Choice, which offers a step-by-step guide to surveying parents, and provides a method and a survey instrument that has been used over a period of five years in four Massachusetts urban school districts.

There is research evidence, especially from the intensive evaluation of 1970s voucher experiments in Alum Rock, California and other locations, which does show that there is cause for the concern that not all groups of parents participate equally in choice programs, that, in fact, more informed (and affluent) parents are more likely to participate in, and hence benefit from, increased opportunities for parent choice. In those cases, the "information deficits" suffered by parents were attributed to schools disseminating information only in the form of print material in the English language. These dissemination strategies may have been appropriate for middle-class, white-collar settings but were not effective for poor or linguistic minority parents. Current practices, happily, are more sensitive to the different ways that information reaches different kinds of parent populations.

The third volume in this series is a Parent Information Strategies providing short profiles, with nuts-and-bolts kind of information, about the range of exemplary parent information strategies from 21 school districts in 11 states across the nation.

Our fourth volume, A Consumer's Guide to Schoools of Choice addresses parents who are in the enviable position of being able to choose but could use help in making the right fit between their aspirations and values and a particular school. This guide is intended to give such parents real-life descriptions of what actually goes on in schools of choice. What is different in

schools that advertise themselves as having an emphasis on a particular style or philosophy of teaching -- i.e., "basic skills" or "classical education" or "child-centered, developmental approach" -- or a particular curricular emphasis, i.e., "the arts" or "science and technology?" The Consumer's Guide elaborates the assumptions about how children learn that lie behind such labels and provides a checklist that enables parents to decide whether their aspirations for and knowledge about their children will match up with the labels that diversified public schools of choice use in describing themselves. The Consumer's Guide sketches daily activities in ten schools in six different school districts in Massachusetts and New York.

Such illustrations belie the general assumption that all parents want the same kind of "good education," an assumption that can and has been used as an argument against providing expanded opportunities for parent choice. The vignettes are all taken from public schools of choice, many of which have long waiting lists, indicating that many parents have a desire for more options than are currently available.

We don't pretend to have all the answers to the puzzle facing local school decision-makers -- school and government officials and parents and citizens -- as they consider ways to respond to the growing desire for more choice of some kind. Neither do we believe that parent choice will solve all of the educational problems facing our nation today. Rather, we prefer

to remain open-minded and offer this publication and its companion volumes to other open-minded readers -- government officials (at all levels), school administrators, and parents and taxpayers -- who have questioned whether we should assign all students to the same kinds of schools on the basis of residency and not according to parental aspirations or children's learning styles.

INTRODUCTION

The following profiles of parent information strategies were chosen to be representative of the efforts public school districts make to inform parents about the choices available to them. Despite the fact that these school districts were not chosen to be exemplary or particularly promising strategies, we believe that many of the strategies these school districts use deserve serious consideration. The underlying message in the profiles seems that to be successful, parent information strategies must reach out to parents on a one-to-one basis wherever school districts find them. Getting information to parents equitably and thoroughly is hard work -- none of the districts profiled have found a way around that -- but without the hard work, parent choice in the public schools is less than it can be. With full information in hand, parents can make choices that are more educationally effective and that promote desegregation and equity.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

PROFILE

Unified school district
Urban setting
Total schools: 129 elementary, 41 junior high/middle, 21 secondary
Schools of choice: 13 high schools and 8 career development centers, and all junior and elementary schools on a space available basis
Total enrollment: 89,000
Student ethnic/racial breakdown:
- Black: 93%
- Hispanic: 3%
- White: 3%
- Other: 1%

OUTREACH

BACKGROUND: With fledging plans for a parent information center, Washington, D.C. currently provides choice information through its communication office.

PUBLICITY: Informational activites in Washington D.C. include brochures distributed to parents about magnet programs. Programs are highlighted in "Parent Advisory," a quarterly newsletter.

Recruitment teams: Each magnet program has recruitment teams primarily made up of teachers who travel to junior highs around the city at recruitment time to make presentations to parent and student groups. Eighth and ninth graders and their parents attend "options" nights which are held system-wide in the four administrative regions. These sessions feature presentations on various high school programs.

Welcome month: The district also hosts a "Welcome to Our Schools Month" during registration and orientation, through which they run a theme "We Earn Our Apple Every Day" and couple that theme each year with a rhyming phrase. (This year they chose, "Working together is the way.") Principals hold tours once a month for prospective parents.

CHALLENGES: "Our parent information services are not just getting the bare facts out but assisting (parents) in a large bureaucracy," says Janis L. Cromer, Director of Communication. Helping parents "not to be baffled is the hardest thing, and one reason why we are trying to get a parent information center with an advocacy unit," says Cromer. Currently people are trained to help parents on an informal basis, but a parent information would be able to more widely publicized and would include a core of trained parent volunteers.

Challenges also include reaching parents of a large non-English speaking enrollment -- more than 99 languages are spoken in the school system -- and the fact that 80% of district students qualify for the free or reduced price lunches.

ADVICE: Cromer advises a broad based support for parent information, beginning with extensive training for support staff. Washington DC offers 16 different sessions of training for their support staff, including how to defuse a situation. Staff must be "understanding," says Cromer, because the contact with support staff is often where parents begin and end their search for information.

For more information, contact Janis L. Cromer, Director of Communications, District of Columbia Public Schools, 415 12th St., NW, Washington, DC 20004, (202) 724-4222.

INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

PROFILE

Unified school district
Urban setting
Total number of schools: 68 elementary, 10 middle. 6 secondary
Schools of choice: 13
Enrollment: 52,000
Student ethnic/racial breakdown:
White: 55%
Black: 45%

OUTREACH

BACKGROUND: Indianapolis started with magnet schools nine years ago, two years before a court order to desegregate. Today they offer parent information services as a coordinated effort between district and city agencies, and between divisions within the school district.

PUBLICITY: Indianapolis publishes brochures on each magnet school program, as well as a citywide guide to schools, or magnet school tabloid, that is mailed to every student, realtors, and all agencies that have contact with the city.

Magnet fairs: The district hosts a magnet fair at the educational center. Every option is represented by teachers at individual booths.

Information meetings: The district strives to make information available by tailoring meetings to parents' schedules. Two parent information meetings are held at each elementary magnet site, in the afternoon and again in the evening.

Open houses and presentations: Open houses at the secondary level are coupled with presentations about secondary magnet programs at feeder schools. Staff from the public relations office also visit Head Start centers to reach parents of preschoolers.

Media: The superintendent and her assistant appear on three local talk shows as recruitment and registration get under way.

Parent line: Parents can dial an advertised telephone number to a district office and then punch in a tape code corresponding to whatever information they need on a particular option. This telephone line is augmented at recruitment when the Dial-A-Teacher line can also be used to get information of magnet programs by directly talking with staff in the Parent Involvement Office.

Evaluation sessions: Administrators gather at the end of each school year to assess the recruitment process and identify areas that could be strengthened.

CHALLENGES: Marsha Foley, instructional coordinator for elementary options, says that the district is striving to improve the number of parents who get information. In the past, information was distributed through schools, libraries and banks, but parents of pre-school children were often missed. This fall the district will send information to every household within the public school boundaries.

ADVICE: Foley stresses that parents must be encouraged to pay a visit to schools they are considering. She adds that parents should "look long and hard" before making a decision.

For more information, contact Marsha Foley, Instructional Coordinator for Options, Indianapolis Public Schools, Educational Center, 120 East Walnut St., Indianapolis, IN 46204, (317) 266-4794.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

PROFILE

Unified school district
Urban setting
Total number of schools: 495
Schools of choice: 44
Enrollment: 430,000
Student racial/ethnic breakdown:
- Black: 60%
- White: 13%
- Hispanic: 23%
- Other: 4%

OUTREACH

BACKGROUND: Chicago is now establishing a parent information center that will open this spring at its central offices. It will be a resource room of information on magnets throughout the city, and will bring together all the information available on choice.

PUBLICITY: A publication put out annually by the Department of Equal Educational Opportunity Programs,"Options for Knowledge Programs," describes the magnet schools, community academies, magnet programs, and voluntary transfer schools. This publication is disseminated through the schools. Parents can also learn about their options through presentations by the subdistrict desegregation coordinator at the meetings of the local school council.

Media: The superintendent of schools and the president of the board of education are guests on a radio call-in show once a month to answer school-related questions and concerns.

CHALLENGES: Funding is the largest challenge for parent choice services. The city faces expiration of contracts with 21 employee groups and a $74 million shortfall and are by no means assured of continued funding for education reform initiatives.

ADVICE: Districts starting parent services are encouraged to involve parents immediately, from the start. Bob Saigh, Director, Department of Communication, says, "The key thing is to involve parents immediately, bring them into the process. They have to be a part of a process that will affect them anyway, and it's a demonstration of good faith."

For more information, contact Bob Saigh, Director, Department of Communications, Chicago Public Schools, 1819 W. Pershing Rd. Chicago, IL 60609 (312) 890-3760.

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

PROFILE

Unified school district
Urban setting
Total number of schools:
83 elementary, 21 middle & junior high, 22 secondary, 10 unique schools & centers, 20 educational support centers
Schools of choice: approximately 20
Enrollment: approximately 84,000
Student ethnic/racial breakdown:
- Black: 86.7%
- White: 8.3%
- Hispanic: 1.7%
- Other: 3.3%

OUTREACH

BACKGROUND: Parent information is offered out of the Department of Information and Community Services. Home of a nationally acclaimed magnet school that opened in the 1950s, New Orleans began a push for more magnets about nine years ago.

PUBLICITY: Recent budget cuts put a crimp in publications about schools of choice, but the city is now planning to publish a citywide booklet or a series of pamphlets on school options with the help of a volunteer citizens group of young executives and in cooperation with the League of Women Voters. This community effort will provide the city with important information to distribute to newcomers and to all parents.

Open houses, parent assistance: Individual schools are expected to provide parents with information about their programs. Schools hold open houses at recruitment time, most mail out information to homes, and all depend on volunteer services of trained parents to assist with registration. Word of mouth from parents, adds Henry Joubert, public information assistant, is a key factor in disseminating information about schools. Parents are encouraged to visit individual schools and talk with principals before making a decision.

CHALLENGES: Funding tops the list of challenges, says Renate May, staff writer in the Department of Information and Community Services. Recently budgets have been cut sharply because the city overestimated the revenues generated by the World's Fair.

ADVICE: May advises that school districts build a network to create a strong parent service structure. Networking involves making connections

with businesses and the chamber of commerce to let them know about schools and their successes -- and to generate support from the community.

For more information, contact either Renate May or Rose Drill-Peterson at New Orleans Public School District, 4100 Touro St. New Orleans, LA 70122, (504) 286-2847.

ACTON, MASSACHUSETTS

PROFILE

Elementary school district
Suburban setting
Total schools: 4 elementary
Schools of choice: 4
Enrollment: 1,609
Student racial/ethnic breakdown:
- White: 98%
- Black: .05%
- Hispanic: .05%
- Other: 1%

PRACTICES

BACKGROUND: Parent choice has played a central role in shaping education for this suburb of Boston. Acton changed its elementary schools from traditional settings to four distinct alternative schools in 1970 after parents voiced an interest in moving away from conservative teaching strategies. Since there are no regular attendance areas, all schools in the district can be considered for selection.

PUBLICITY: The district holds general information meetings and provides written and audiovisual information or procedures and schools. Each school holds information meetings and invites parents to visit. Booklets on kindergarten, curriculum, registration procedures and descriptions of each school are provided.

CHALLENGES: Gary Baker, Assistant Superintendent, says a common problem is countering rumors parents spread about school programs. Although the word-of-mouth referral can be useful, it can also denigrate schools that deserve a second look. Baker says parents are urged to tour schools, talk to principals, and make up their own minds.

ADVICE: Baker suggests that Acton has succeeded in part because of geography -- all four elementary schools are within two to two and a half miles of each other thereby diminishing problems of transportation.
But, Acton has also built on another strength, namely parent support. Choice evolved naturally from the interests of parents. Parent and teacher participation in shaping choice programs is essential to getting off to a good start and maintaining strong programs, says Baker.

For more information, contact Gary G. Baker, Assistant Superintendent, Acton Public Schools, 16 Charter Rd., Acton, MA 01720, (617) 264-4700.

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

PROFILE

Unified school district
Urban setting
Total number of schools: 77 elementary, 22 middle, 17 secondary
Schools of choice: 23
Total enrollment: 57,642
Student racial/ethnic breakdown:
- Black: 48%
- White: 26%
- Hispanic: 18%
- Other: 8%

PRACTICES

BACKGROUND: Boston is divided into five districts, each of which provides some kind of parent information services. Parents throughout the city can dial a direct line for information on schools and programs, and also turn to their district centers for more specific information. A student assignment information book is distributed to each student during the application period in early April and is available throughout the year.

Although each district office has a parent information center, District E is responsible for handling information for Boston's 23 city-wide magnet schools, grades K-1 through 12.

This year, District E will change the title of the Retention and Recruitment Program to the Parent Information Center. The Center will expand services to include organizing workshops in schools on parent training, and developing stronger links with parents in general.

PUBLICITY: Currently, District E, through its Retention and Recruitment Program, has three parent outreach workers and one recruitment coordinator in charge of disseminating information about the city-wide magnet schools. Television, radio, and newspapers are all important promotional tools.

Magnet school day: This year for the second time, District E is hosting a magnet school day, devoted to educating parents about their options. This centrally located event is promoted by the liaisons at day care centers, nurseries, comunity centers. This year's event will not only highlight citywide magnet schools, but citywide programs and individual districts, to allow parents to compare a wider selection of schools. The district is also providing parent workshops on such topics as improving parent/teacher conferences, summer tutoring programs, and library use. The district

provides transportation.

CHALLENGES: With choice no longer a new concept in Boston, Marjorie Joyce, recruitment coordinator for District E, says promoting the notion of choice is not the big issue. Rather, the district is working hard to fine-tune how parents make their choice. Joyce says parents often make a decision simply based on hearsay, or on their impression that the school is "good," but fail to take into account that a magnet school means a certain kind of program that might not fit their child's needs. "They've heard it's a good school, but they don't understand that it has an angle," says Joyce. "They've stopped listening after they've heard it's a good school."

Joyce hopes that the magnet school day event will help parents make more educated choices.

One problem, adds Joyce, has been that parents may transfer their child from one school to another, but be reluctant to talk to staff about reasons for their disappointments with the school. Instead, a recent district survey found that parents prefer to talk to other parents. The center will try to fill this need by hiring parents whom parents can talk to about problems.

ADVICE: Joyce says that a parent information center is an excellent idea because parents need a place where they can go for help and to talk to other parents for support.

For more information, about Boston in general, contact Ronald Chavious, Student Recruitment Specialist, Boston School Department, 26 Court St., 9th Floor, Boston, MA 02108, (617) 726-6200 (ext. 5563) or for District E, Marjorie Joyce, District E Office, 55 New Dudley St., Boston, MA 02119, (617) 442-1396.

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PROFILE

Unified school district
Urban setting
Total schools: 14
Schools of choice: 13 elementary schools
Enrollment: 7,677
Student ethnic/racial groupings:
- White: 52%
- Black: 29%
- Hispanic: 12%
- Asian: 6%

OUTREACH

BACKGROUND: Cambridge centralizes most of its parent information operation at a Parent Information Center, now in its sixth year.

PUBLICITY: Parents may turn to several publications for assistance in making choiceS. A 64-page booklet explains Cambridge services and profiles each school. A map of the city of shows where each school is located and a copy of the city's desegregation plan explains the history behind the schools of choice.

Flyers are mailed in October announcing an informational meeting in November and registration in December. There is also a large mailing to Head Start parents who will have a child entering the school system the next year. These are also followed up with a visit. Advertisements are also taken out in newspapers.

Liaison network: Liaisons act as "branches" of the Center and are employed at each of the city's 13 elementary schools. They work 20 hours a week out throughout the school year.

The Center has developed a neighborhood focus -- through the liaisons -- to provide local channels for information, because parents will usually go to their neighborhood school first for answers. The liaisons tell them to contact the Center, and will arrange for school tours and class visits.

Liaisons are required to take extensive training, including how to take applications so they can pitch in during peak registration time (in December when the Center kicks off registration).

Information nights: Two informational parent nights, one at the Center, and the other in the north end of the city at another school, are held in November. Each school prepares a kinderarten display and a teacher is available to anwer

questions. Every department is represented -- bilingual, special education, nursing, health. A slide presentation, prepared and presented by the city's primary education coordinator, describes what life is like in kindergarten. In December, Margaret Gallagher, citywide parent coordinator, and a team of liaisons kick off registration by spending two weeks traveling to each school.

CHALLENGES: A large transient population prevents the Center from reaching all parents it would like to reach. The Center also cannot reach those parents who do not yet have children in the school system, and have not, for whatever reason, enrolled their child in a pre-school program.

ADVICE: The early registration works well for Cambridge, says Gallagher, because it gives the public schools an edge over its competitors, the private schools. "Public education really needs to do marketing -- you need to convince the general public you have something to offer, you have to market its assets," says Gallagher. The Center also avoids the potential for confusion and frustration that can occur when there are many people in scattered offices giving out information.

For more information, contact Peter Colleary, Staff Assignment Officer, Charles G. Harrington School, 850 Cambridge St., Cambridge, MA, 02141, (617) 498-9250.

HOLYOKE, MASSACHUSETTS

PROFILE

Unified school district
urban setting
Total number of schools: 10 elementary, 2 middle, 2 secondary
Schools of choice: 5
Total enrollment: 6,941
Student racial/ethnic breakdown:
- Hispanic: 48%
- White: 47%
- Black: 4%
- Other: 1%

OUTREACH

BACKGROUND: A parent information center is the hub of parent outreach activities for Holyoke. Every call is logged and responded to by two directors, a full-time staff of two bilingual secretaries and one translator.

PUBLICITY: Holyoke publicizes school options with brochures, and also publishes a newsletter of events. Released three times a year, the newsletter reminds parents that the center is available and can answer their questions. Parent Power Sheets are also published monthly to inform parents about public school programs. Magnet school open houses and tours are scheduled through the center.

Patchwork Fair: The center also hosts a variety of activities, including an annual Patchwork Fair of games, crafts, and exhibits that showcase city schools. Holyoke also counts on active parent advisory councils who work with the center in reaching out to involve all parents in school decisions and activities.

CHALLENGES: Accessibility is a key problem, says Robert O'Neill, a co-director of the center. All the staff has many responsibilities to juggle, says O'Neill, and the center could well use five full-time people to better answer calls.

ADVICE: A positive step for any parent information effort is to set up a parent information center, says O'Neill. Housing all services under one roof, he says, is "an example of a commitment to parents and it's worth the price."

For more information, contact Felicita El Ghadi or Robert O'Neill, Directors, Parent Information Center, Holyoke Public Schools, 98 Suffolk Street, Holyoke, MA 01040, (413) 534-2007.

LOWELL, MASSACHUSETTS

PROFILE

Unified school district
Urban setting
Total Schools: 20
Schools of choice: 7
Total enrollment: 12,782
Student racial/ethnic breakdown:
- White: 68.72%
- Hispanic: 14.66%
- Other (largely Asian): 14.59%
- Black: 2.02%

OUTREACH

BACKGROUND: The school committee recently voted down a parent coordinator so that now the parent information is largely the job of one project director in charge of developing, implementing magnet schools and dealing with desegregation and recruitment. He is aided by a part-time bilingual parent coordinator.

PUBLICITY: Each magnet school is described in brochures available at the local or district level.

Parents are welcome to visit with the Project Director and talk about the various programs at the city's magnets. They are also encouraged to talk with magnet principals to better understand the theme of each school.

When students leave one of the two city-wide magnets, there are exit interviews for both parents and students.

Recruitment: There are lengthy waiting lists at each magnet school. When a student inquires about a magnet school, they are put on the waiting list and notified by the project director when an opening arises. If they decide to attend that school, parents are provided with a packet of information about school procedures.

Bilingual outreach: Bilingual parents are directly sought out regardless of whether or not they are on the waiting list. The bilingual parent coordinator contacts families and often visits homes to inform parents about the choices available. Non-bilingual parents are expected to contact a magnet school by themselves if they are interested in finding out more about it.

CHALLENGES: Project Director George Tsapatsaris cites a parent information center and a parent coordinator as two resources that would be helpful

in providing parent services in Lowell.

ADVICE: According to Tsapatsaris, the single most important factor in setting up schools of choice is to have the support of parents, teachers, and students. Consequently, if a school principal wants to set up a magnet, teachers and parents must be able to express their support, or disapproval, in a survey for the idea and direction of the magnet.

For more information contact George N. Tsapatsaris, Lowell School Department, 89 Appleton Street, Lowell, MA 01852. (617) 947-7615.

SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

PROFILE

Unified school district
Urban setting
Total number of schools: 20 elementary, 6 middle, 3 secondary
Schools of choice: 13
Enrollment: 22,677
Student racial/ethnic breakdown:

White:	44.3%
Black:	27.9%
Hispanic:	26.8%
Other:	1%

OUTREACH

BACKGROUND: Springfield opened a magnet juior high in 1969, and in 1974 initiated three magnets. The city now has a total of 13 magnet schools.

PUBLICITY: This year, for the first time, the city invested in publishing a professionally printed comprehensive brochure describing citywide schools of choice. This recruitment publication is printed in Spanish and English and is distributed to all parents and seven branches of the public library at recruitment time. Press releases are also sent to television and radio stations.

Presentations: Vivian George, Supervisor of Chapter 636 programs, (those funded by the state's racial imbalance law,) talks to parents who have children enrolled in early childhood centers and to parents of grade four children at PTO meetings about upcoming grade 5 and 6 options. Some schools have trained home liaison people to help keep communications open between parents and the school.

Magnet advisory committee: The city's outreach effort includes parent participation on a citywide magnet advisory committee made up of administrators, teachers, and parents. Principals are asked to select one or two teachers and two parents to serve at committee meetings, held two or three times a year. The meetings inform parents about programs, discuss concerns and issues, and vote on decisions that are passed onto school administrators.

CHALLENGES: George cites parent involvement as one of the city's major challenges. This year, the city has tried to make parents more aware of being a part of the schools by running a day-long workshop for parents from 40 schools across the city to familiarize them with the workings of the schools -- how money is allocated and spent, for which services, desegregation, and other information that aims to show parents how they can

help schools. This fall workshop will be followed up by a spring workshop.

ADVICE: George suggests that communities continue to try and think of ways to reach all parents. In Springfield, the deputy superintendent has set up a Parent Involvement Task Force to generate ideas and programs to reach and involve more parents, particularly those who are "hard-to-reach."

For more information, contact Vivian George, Springfield Public Schools, 195 State St. Springfield, MA 01103, (413) 787-7092.

WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

PROFILE

Unified school district
Urban setting
Total schools: 40 elementary, 4 middle, 4 secondary
Schools of choice: 11 out of 48
Total enrollment: 20,113
Percentage minority: 25.5
Student racial/ethnic breakdown:

White:	74.5%
Hispanic:	15.5%
Black:	7%
Other:	3%

OUTREACH

BACKGROUND: Worcester opened an information center in 1985 that is staffed by one person during school hours and school year only. This person's duties include establishing and managing the information center, acting as liaison to parent groups at all magnet schools, assisting, scheduling, and running meetings for parents, and preparing materials for parent meetings, parent reports and recommendation, and community publicity information. The center answers questions about school policies that may be confusing and intimidating, helps parents with day-to-day events, puts them in touch with schools, and assists parents in their search for information about magnet schools, transfer policies, choices, and volunteerism, among other concerns.

PUBLICITY: Brochures are available on each school and as the schools open brochures are send to parents. A citywide brochure covers all the magent options. All are distributed to libraries and schools. Bookmarks with the parent information center number on them are also distributed in all city schools.

CHALLENGES: Funding has been the largest challenge, says Roland Charpentier, magnet school coordinator. Magnets, says Charpentier, "cost a lot of money," and are often copied when they suceed; two all-day kindergartens, for example, have now grown to 40. In a largely working-class city, those costs are not easily met, says Charpentier.

ADVICE: Charpentier advises districts to develop teams of principals and parents to create themes for magnets. Worcester has used surveys for five years to find out what parents want, and this effort has paid off with shaping attractive, effective alternative schools.

For more information, contact Roland E. Charpentier, Magnet School Coordinator, Worcester Public Schools, 20 Irving St., Worcester, MA 01609 (617) 799-3033.

KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

PROFILE

Unified school district
Urban setting
Total schools: 50 elementary, 8 junior high, 10 senior high, 1 pre-vocational education, 1 special school for handicapped students, 1 school for teen parents, and 1 alternative school
Schools of choice: 3 in fall 1986
19 in fall 1987
49 in fall 1991
Enrollment: 36,000
Student racial/ethnic breakdown:
(does not include special schools)
Black: 66%
White: 29%
Hispanic: 4%
Other: 1.4%

OUTREACH

BACKGROUND: This is the first year Kansas City has offered schools of choice; the city aims to implement 49 schools of choice over the next six years. Plans include a proposal for a parent information center.

PUBLICITY: The district produces brochures describing different programs and distributed through the District Information Center and local schools. The district also inserts a full-color magazine in the local Sunday paper with a tear-out application during peak registration time. Plans include developing district and building level newsletters. Staff now includes a graphic artist and a writer.

Personalized recruitment: Kansas City's plan for magnet schools stresses the need to personalize recruitment. To be effective, general mailings and dissemination of brochures are followed up by telephone calls and meetings with small groups of parents. The 1986 proposal for desegregation includes a list of suggested activites now under way some, including the following:

1) Schedule and provide presentations to private and district children's centers and/or preschools

2) Provide giveaways with generalized magnet promotion, i.e., book covers, bookmarks

3) Place flyers and brochures where target students and parents gather, and with businesses

4) Hold coffee meetings in target communties and seek PTA support

5) Establish career fairs at secondary level, and recruitment booths in shopping centers on

weekends.

Other outreach: Andrea Jolly-Penn, recruitment specialist, also makes personal speaking engagements to city groups such as Kiwanis, to introduce them to the school programs, and to realtors to educate them about the desegregation program and school options.

Media: Newspapers, radio and television are also important avenues of advertisement.

Staff, training: The district is also planning to hire site-based recruiters, people with teaching certification and experience, who will be located in several schools to answer questions and streamline the registration process.

Additional involvement: The district depends as well on volunteer parents. School Advisory Committees participate in curriculum planning, and other educational concerns. An umbrella organization brings together chairpersons of these committees with school board members. In addition, the district has invited parents, and community members at large, to join site task forces which will focus on curriculum planning for magnet schools. These task forces of about five to 15 members, will be chaired by principals and overseen by curriculum specialists.

CHALLENGES: Jolly-Penn says that the single greatest challenge facing Kansas City is changing attitudes of parents about magnet schools and desegregation. "No one has attempted to [create magnets] on this large a scale," says Jolly-Penn. "We have a tremendous challenge changing atitudes of the parents and selling the concept of a larger educational community. We really need to bring the public along ... we have an opportunity to provide a model for other cities."

ADVICE: Districts establishing parent information services should be sure to make information as available as possible, says Jolly-Penn. The most effective way to get information out is to have someone available by the phone every day all year. "More than half of our informational work is done over the phone," says Jolly-Penn. "There really does need to be someone to talk to. That will do more to sell the program than anything else." Jolly-Penn also advises that parents be involved in task forces when shaping magnet programs.

For more information, contact Andrea Jolly-Penn, Kansas City School District, 1211 McGee St., Kansas City, MO 64106, (816) 221-7565, ext. 308.

MONTCLAIR, NEW JERSEY

PROFILE

Unified school district
Suburban community 15 miles west of New York City
Total schools: 6 elementary, 2 middle, 1 secondary
Schools of choice: 9, all district schools
Enrollment: 5,200
Student ethnic/racial breakdown:

White:	51%
Black:	46%
Hispanic:	2%
Other:	1%

OUTREACH

BACKGROUND: A parent information center opened in 1977 and is now run by two full-time staff, a director of public relations and a secretary. The center handles questions relating to all the magnet schools.

PUBLICITY: Brochures describe each magnet school.

Open houses, meetings: The district has open houses every spring when days are set aside and parents can visit schools while they are in session. Open houses are also planned for evenings for those parents who work.

Parents are urged to come in and talk to all principals. The district offers a series of evening meetings to describe primary programs and give an overview of Montclair schools.

CHALLENGES: One problem is making the school staff feel comfortable with parent involvement, or reaching a "cooperative understanding," says Barbara Strobert, director of special projects. "Often we get aggressive parents and parameters have to be set up ... we try to get parents to be volunteers in the school so they get a better picture of what it's all about."

ADVICE: Administrators of parent outreach programs must be willing to be non-traditional in staffing to make services available when parents are -- often evenings or weekends for working parents.

For more information, contact Barbara Strobert, Director of Special Projects, Montclair Public Schools, 22 Valley Rd. Montclair, NJ 07042, (201) 783-4000.

BUFFALO, NEW YORK

PROFILE

Unified school district
Urban setting
Schools of choice: 20
Total schools: 58 elementary, 17 secondary
Enrollment: 46,173
Student ethnic/racial breakdown:
- Black: 48%
- White: 43.3%
- Hispanic: 6.3%
- Native American: 1.2%
- Asian: 0.9%

OUTREACH

BACKGROUND: Now in its twelvth year, Buffalo's parent information center operates as a magnet school placement office, as well as information center. It is staffed by a director, a community education leader, two clerical staff, and one teacher-assistant transportation liaison.

SERVICES: The center's major thrust is advertising options in all local papers, and through public service announcements on radio and television, and with the support and announcments of the PTA and the Buffalo Area Ministers Association. Open houses are held in all schools during recruitment, and brochures and a tabloid describing all schools are distributed.

CHALLENGES: A constant problem is securing funding, maintaining local and federal budgets to keep quality programs intact, says Kenneth Echols, assistant superintendent of integration/public relations. Another problem is available spaces for students; Buffalo recently had 13,000 applications for 2,400 openings.

ADVICE: Districts are urged to develop extensive community networks and ties with media to get the word out about choice. In the early stages of choice in Buffalo, radio stations adopted schools and that effort helped magnify the schools images. The parent centers themselves go a long way toward disseminating information.

For more information, contact Kenneth J. Echols, Assistant Superintendent Integration/Public Relations, Buffalo Public Schools, 732 City Hall, Buffalo, NY 14202, (716) 842-3187.

NEW YORK, NEW YORK (Community School District #4)

PROFILE

Secondary and elementary school district
Urban setting
Total number of schools: 52 elementary: 16 mainstream, 9 bilingual, 6 alternative concept
Middle: 2 mainstream, 1 bilingual, 16 alternative concept.
Total schools of choice: 22 (6 magnet schools included in total)
Enrollment: 12,000
Student ethnic/racial breakdown:
Black: 45%
Hispanic: 35%
Other: 20%

OUTREACH

BACKGROUND: District #4 in East Harlem is the only one of New York City's 32 school districts that is "open zoned"; its boundary lines are not exclusive in that students are accepted from all over the city. Some students who live outside New York City also attend District #4 schools. The primary system with District #4 is the Alternative School Network, comprising 17 alternative schools at the junior high level, and five at the elementary level. Each spring, sixth grade students from 21 schools, and in bilingual education programs, consult with their teachers and parents, review their options and select the junior high school that they would like to attend.

District #4 centralizes its parent information services in a parent information center. There also exists a stong, yet smaller bilingual alternative school network that has a parent information center working out of the district office.

PUBLICITY: The district suffers from no shortage of publicity, having been featured internationally in newspapers and on television for its exemplary school programs.

To specifically educate parents about making the appropriate choice, however, they publish "Decisions about Seventh Grade," in English and Spanish, a booklet that describes the various schools programs.

Evening meetings: During recruitment, evening meetings are held at the parent information center where parents are given the information to help them make the appropriate choices. The ten

directors of the alternative seventh grades make presentations.

School visits: Directors will also visit each of the 21 elementary schools to make presentations to students about individual programs.

Parent Assocations: "We couldn't do as much as we do in educating without parents," adds assistant director of alternative services, Mary E. Romer-Colemen. "Our strength lies in the Parent Associations housed separately in every alternative school." Direct information can be acquired by calling any of the schools.

Community Planning Board: The parent information office also makes use of a calendar of area events put out by the Community Planning Board for all residents. The center will list upcoming school events and important dates to remember at recruitment time.

CHALLENGES: Romer-Coleman says the largest challenge is simply getting parents involved with schools so that they will be participants in their child's education.

ADVICE: Romer-Coleman says she would give another district setting up parent information services the "Pollyanna" advice -- do what ever works. Sell whatever you can, and don't exclude other people in the district who don't have children in schoool. "Our schools don't exist if we don't have the support of the community," she says.

For more information, contact Mary E. Romer-Coleman, Assistant Director of Alternative Services, Community School District #4, 319 East 117th St., New York, NY 10035, (212) 860-5974, 5967.

CLEVELAND, OHIO

PROFILE

Unified School District
Urban setting
Total number of schools: 83 elementary, 22 middle, 12 secondary
Schools of choice: 11
Total enrollment: 73,263
Student racial/ethnic breakdown:
Black: 69.68%
White: 24.38%
Hispanic: 5.64%
Other: 1.29%

OUTREACH

BACKGROUND: Cleveland's Parent/Community Information Center opened in April, 1987, after parent outcry protested the loss of a similar service. Choice was first offered in 1980. The center offers many services. These include developing networks with community resources, curriculum materials and school information, speakers contacted and provided for parent groups, workshops on effective parenting techniques and to help parents help their children with homework.

PUBLICITY: Each magnet school has its own brochure available at the registration center. The Bilingual/Multicultural Office translates all district material into Spanish and eight other languages. The information center also contracts with that office to supply translators at meetings. A school calendar goes out in late August to remind parents of school events.

"Cluster meetings": Meetings are held on both sides of the city to accommodate all residents. A "cluster" of department heads and program chairpeople explain programs.

Media: Arrangements are made to have school officials talk on local talk shows about magnet schools.

CHALLENGES: Getting information to parents well ahead of registration is one major challenge for Cleveland, says Juanita Bryant, executive assistant. Applications are disseminated in early February, but many parents who do not get it back by the March 15 deadline.

ADVICE: Bryant says the district has found it helpful to work with advisory groups to develop programs that address citizen needs. These groups could be made up of parents, professionals, teachers, supervisors and representatives of businesses and social agencies.

For more information, contact Juanita Bryant, Executive Assistant, Cleveland City School District, 1380 East Sixth St. Cleveland, OH 44114, (216) 574-8632.

COLUMBUS, OHIO

PROFILE

Unified school district
Urban setting
Total number of schools: 90 elementary, 26 middle, 20 secondary
Schools of choice: 10 (31 by Fall, 1987)
Total enrollment: 66,000
Student ethnic/racial groupings:
White: 53.4%
Black: 46.6%

OUTREACH

BACKGROUND: A parent information center started as one phone in the office of Beverly Gifford, special assistant to the superintendent in 1977 and later increased to 14 phones staffed by volunteers. Now four staff members handle calls to the office, located in a central administration complex. Staff includes volunteers and one full-time member, a communication specialist who handles public relations.

PUBLICITY: The city is mounting a marketing campaign to reach parents as it more than triples the number of schools of choice this comming fall. Outreach efforts include a "mini-newspaper" distributed to realtors and the chamber of commerce where newcomers find them, and at each level of magnet schools. The newspaper discusses the options available at all schools but also details alternative schools. The daily newspaper is also running a series on schools during the application period.

Each school has a brochure, and the city has also begun a series of meetings around the city that include displays and handouts of schools so parents can "shop" for the right school. Alternative and traditional schools set up booths.

Factline: Parents can dial a factline -- 221-FACT -- to get information about the application process and individual programs.

CHALLENGES: Gifford says that jealousy between the staff in the traditional and alternative schools is a challenge; parent's whose child does not get into an alternative school often feel "that they've lost, that they are stuck with less than good," says Gifford. The city is trying hard to turn that perception around by talking up the traditional schools. "The traditional schools have a lot to brag about," says Gifford. By encouraging the conventional schools to market themselves right

along with the alternative schools, the city can maintain a healthy competition.

ADVICE: The parent information center has helped to consolidate and streamline the parent outreach effort. Volunteers are trained extensively, and the best volunteers, adds Gifford, are retired principals who bring a wealth of knowledge about schools, and in parent relations, to the center.

For more information, contact Beverly Gifford, Special Assistant to the Superintendent, Columbus Public Schools, 270 E. State St., Columbus, OH 43215, (614) 225-2888.

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

PROFILE

Secondary school district
Urban setting
Total number of schools: 258 (173 elementary, 39 middle, 41 secondary
Schools of choice: 50
Enrollment: 200,370
Student ethnic/racial breakdown:

Black:	64%
White:	23.9%
Hispanic:	8.9%
Other:	3.2%

OUTREACH

BACKGROUND: Philadelphia's desegregation office serves as its parent information center. Started in 1978, the office is striving to increase the percentage of desegregated schools across the city, according to Leroy Keyes, desegregation liaison specialist. With about 83 schools out of 253 on board now, that means continued and rigorous outreach to inform and parents and recruit students.

PUBLICITY: Information is disseminated through radio advertisement and a publication "Options for Learning" that gives a brief description of 50 targeted schools -- schools that are close to reaching mandated desegregation ratios. This publication is available at all schools, district school offices, and libraries.
The desegregation office also publishes a monthly magazine, Reflections, that highlights city school achievements. Brochures are available on school programs if individual schools choose to develop them.

Hotline: Parents can dial a 24-hour information hotline. During the working day, desegregation office staff take calls while an answering machine takes calls after hours.

Desegmobile: Parents are encouraged to visit their district office or speak to guidance counselors at schools for more information about schools of choice. However, information is also brought to parents via a Desegmobile that serves as a parent information center on wheels; the camper-style van travels all over the city during good weather and is parked in convenient locations such as shoping areas for parents to see and visit. Two doors open to allow parents to walk through the van and view artwork and display cases from various schools. Three liaison specialists and a coordinator are on hand to talk about programs. While the hours of the van have been concentrated

from 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., the district hopes to soon increase those hours to include weekends, says Keyes, and thereby reach working parents.

Gallery of options: The Philadelphia school district also holds an annual school fair in a downtown art gallery to showcase selected city schools and recruit students. The fairs feature performances and fashion shows and include opportunities to interview students and staff. The fair strives to give a sampling of all city schools, including racially isolated schools and targeted schools.

Other Outreach: The school district plans information workshops for parents during recruitment period. Staff hold full-day workshops in district libraries during recruitment, for instance, and interview parents and students. If a parent has a problem with transportation to an open house or orientation, the office will provide transportation to and from the school. If a school doesn't offer orientation, the office will arrange a session.

CHALLENGE: Getting parents involved in the overall education of their children is one major challenge facing Philadelphia, says Keyes. Parents that fail to provide their children with a wholesome breakfast or to attend extracurricular activities their children are involved in, fail to provide vital education support. Lack of transportation, inability to find or afford babysitters, and work schedules contribute to parents' inability to be involved. Keyes says home-school councils work closely with principals to try and improve parent involvement. The district also offers ten workshops during the year for parents who are new to desegregation; these sessions focus on developing parents' communication skills so that they can approach a school concern or problem effectively.

ADVICE: Keyes suggests that districts find ways of "getting the word out." There is no guarantee that a child will get information home. "The bottom line," advises Keyes, "is saturate the news, the libraries; get involved in an athletic or civic organization. Make sure everyone is aware of your program."

For more information, contact Dr. Ernestine J. Carter, Director, Desegregation Office, School District of Philadelphia, 21st and the Parkway, Room 610, Philadelphia, PA 19103, (215) 299-7672.

PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

PROFILE

Unified School District
Urban setting
Total schools: 47 elementary, 14 middle, 11 secondary
Schools of choice: 55
Enrollment: 39,900
Student ethnic/racial breakdown:
Black: 52.3%
White: 46.4%
Other: 1.3%

OUTREACH

BACKGROUND: The Director of Public Information is responsible for development and distribution of all information about choices, or options in education in the Pittsburgh public schools. Funding from the federal government in the form of a Magnet Assistance Grant has provided a magnet recruiter who is responsible to the director.

A parent information center is being piloted at the elementary staff development school. This center is intended to educate and train parents how best to help their children academically. Hands-on tutoring materials, learning games, tips on self-discipline, child development information, nutrition and many other topics are available at the center. Outreach includes addressing the needs of the "hard-to-reach" parent.

SERVICES: The magnet recruiter develops specific strategies for each program or school, developing printed materials, making personal presentations to community groups, school classes and parent-teacher organizations, and answering the many telephone calls that come in from parents. Meetings with real estate agents, visitor bureau personnel, university placement and employment personnel, and other corporate employee services staff are also an important part of recruitment and information.

PUBLICITY: Federal funding allows Pittsburgh to mail a comprehensive guide about schools to every household in the the city in advance of registration. This direct mail piece generates many calls to the magnet assistance office, information services, and school department.

Parent coffees: Small parent meetings or "coffees" are an important part of recruitment for the Pittsburgh magnets. Word of mouth, the personal recommendation of a program or school from the parent of a successful child to another parent, continues to carry much more weight than any other

form of advertising.

Option Information Fair: The public schools host an Option Information Fair on a Saturday at the Board of Education building. Parents may talk with parents, students and faculty representatives from all the magnet schools and programs, kindergarten through high school. The may learn of the advantages of the mainstream comprehensive school program as well as each of the specialized magnet programs.

City-wide steering committee: Mary Ellen Kirby, a magnet recruiter and community relations specialist, adds that a consort is being convened for the first time this year to try and coordinate city-wide parent services. This group will include staff from Head Start, parent representatives and school volunteers, among others, and will get together once a month to talk about parent education and services.

CHALLENGES: Kirby says that one priority of the school district is to increase the breadth and depth of parent involvement. "Parents need to know how to become advocates -- how to keep pace with their children's transitions."

For more information, contact Patricia Crawford, Public Information Director, Pittsburgh Public Schools, 341 South Bellefield, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, (412) 622-3615, -6, or -7.

DALLAS, TEXAS

PROFILE

Unified school district
Urban setting
Total number of schools:
131 elementary, 24 middle, 33 secondary
Schools of choice: 20 (9 high school magnets, 7 academies (grades 7-8), and 4 Vanguard Schools (grades 4-6).
Total enrollment: 132,388
Student ethnic/racial breakdown:
- Black: 49%
- Hispanic: 28%
- White: 21%
- Other: 2%

OUTREACH

BACKGROUND: Dallas opened a School Action Center (a parent information center) in 1975. The center is now staffed by one director, two information specialists, and one supervisor.

PUBLICITY: With 350 square miles of school district, Dallas can present an overwhelming challenge to parents. The School Action Center helps parents find out about which neighborhood school they can send their children to, as well describe the alternative schools. The School Action Center will send information to parents, and direct them to the individual schools they are interested in.

A "Report to Parents" is a tabloid annual report published each school year that describes school programs, successes, schedules, changes in policy, updates on legislation, and other items.

Community relations staff include representatives of minority groups and many newsletters are now printed in English and Spanish. To meet the needs of a growing Asian population, the district provides a message in newsletters in different Asian languages that directs the readers to a phone number if they want information but cannot read English.

Positive Parents of Dallas: A group of parents called Positive Parents of Dallas, made up of grandparents, patrons, alumni and civic leaders, place master notebooks containing information on each school in every realtor's office. Volunteers take prospective neighbors on a personal tour of schools they want to see.

Media: The school district has its own cable television station and staff that reports on school programs, people, and events year round all day and

all week long.

Recruitment teams: At the local level, each magnet high school has recruitment teams made up of curriculum staff who visit middle schools at recruitment time and talk about their programs to large and small groups of students. Schools also host open houses.

CHALLENGES: Two-thirds of the people who live in the school district do not have children in schools, says Rodney Davis, director of information services. That figure, combined with a steady dose of negative press coverage of the schools, creates an attitude among many taxpayers that the schools are not run properly, and in turn these attitudes can hurt projects to involve parents and promote the school successes, he says. More effort is being spent, consequentially, on building up active community volunteer programs and boosting school support.

ADVICE: Davis suggests that parent outreach should not rely too much on printed material. The more staff can meet face-to-face with parents at the local school level the more effective the outreach will be; printed materials are good, but they can very well end up being tossed out instead of read. Davis encourages community meetings to give parents first-hand information about their local schools, and to respond better to feedback.

For more information, contact Larry Ascough, Assistant to the Superintendent -- Communication, or Rodney Davis, Dallas Independent School District, 3700 Ross Ave., Dallas, TX 75204, (214) 824-1620, ext. 471.

MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

PROFILE

Unified School District
Urban setting
Total schools: 108 elementary, 19 middle, 15 high, 5 other
Schools of choice: all schools
Enrollment: 93,731
Student enthic/racial breakdown:
- Black: 53.9%
- White: 34%
- Hispanic: 7.5%
- Other: 4.6%

OUTREACH

BACKGROUND: Milwaukee processes in excess of 32,000 choices annually; to handle that load, every school serves as a parent information center.

PUBLICITY: Parents find out about what choices are available to them through several ways: an annual educational catalog is mailed to 62,000 homes, and 74,000 go out to suburban homes, and another 20-30,000 are distributed to schools and libraries before recruitment. A parent/student handbook is also sent out in August describing the school system. Guidance counselors of the middle schools will speak at elementary schools about career programs at the high schools to help students make the right choices.

Letters and media: Television and radio and newspaper ads also announce the recruitment period. The school superintendent is also on a radio talk show monthly. Letters are sent out to targeted parents, or parents who have children in 4-year-old kindergarten program who are faced with different choices for 5-year-old kindergarten. Parents who have children finishing in elementary schools for the middle school also get a letter explaining that it is time to make a choice, and encouraging them to talk to principals and visit schools.

Parent book: Every principal is considered the best source of information. They each have access to a "parent book" containing samples of letters, procedures to follow and attend in-service workshops every year on how to help parents.

CHALLENGES: The biggest problem facing Milwaukee is there are parents who have "never set foot inside the school," says Bob Tesch, assistant to the superintendent.

ADVICE: Tesch advises that school districts "never stop working" to promote parent involvement. The

inenvitable turnover of parents demands flexibility in blending old ways and new ideas.

For more imformation, contact Bob Tesch, Assistant to the Superintendent, Milwaukee Public Schools, P.O. Drawer 10K, Milwaukee, WI 53201, (414) 475-8274.